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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 000348

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PM](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: PANAMA: MARTINELLI ADVISER WEIGHS IN ON ELECTION
DAY

Summary

¶1. (C) Dennis Allen, former Electoral Tribune (TE) magistrate and current "electoral process adviser" to Alliance for Change presidential candidate Ricardo Martinelli ran down for the Political Section his vision of how Panama's May 3 elections will play out. Although the election would probably proceed without major incident, Allen worried that a close vote would cause the loser, whom he believed would be Balbina Herrera of the ruling Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD), to cry foul. Technical innovations to the tabulation system are being used for the first time, and he was concerned about potential failures and mistakes. Allen also noted that the Panamenista Party was mounting an effort to drive up its participation on election day in a campaign to improve VP candidate and Panamenista Party President Juan Carlos Varela's stature within the Alliance, and that the Martinelli camp would need to lean heavily on the Panamenistas for organizational support on election day. End summary.

Mapping out May 3

¶2. (C) Allen explained that although the campaign had been "too conflictive," he did not expect violence beyond minor or isolated incidents. Allen was more concerned about the potential for tabulation confusion or errors. The TE is using a new Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) system to tally the votes, and Allen expressed concern over the potential for computer crashes and counting or typographical errors by the 20,000 TE inspectors. Under the new system, TE inspectors send via cellphone a text-message of voting results to a central location where they are automatically entered into computer software to be tabulated. (Note: In the past, TE inspectors called the TE operation center and reported the tallies verbally; this system allowed for a verbal confirmation of the correct number that is lacking under the WAP system.) "If the vote is close," Allen feared, "this new method will be called into question and the loser may challenge the whole thing." Since the present election is particularly tense, Allen opined that this may not be the best time to debut the new system. He hoped that to avoid such potential problems the victor won by "at least 20,000 votes so the PRD cannot cry fraud and challenge the results."

Allen revealed that Martinelli's Democratic Change (CD) party polls indicate that Martinelli would win by 100,000 votes, but admitted that Panamenista Party polls showed a smaller margin of victory. (Note: 2.2 million Panamanians are registered to vote; local analysts predict 75% turnout.) In any case, Allen hoped that the loser would concede soon after the preliminary results are released between 7:00 and

8:00 PM. He added that his team was prepared to call President Martin Torrijos to push Herrera to concede if she fails to do so within an acceptable timeframe, in order to "maintain calm and relieve anxiety."

Panamenistas: Check the right box

¶ 13. (C) According to Allen, Panamenista leaders are mounting efforts to ensure that their supporters vote for Martinelli under the Panamenista banner in order to give Varela increased negotiating power should the ticket emerge victorious. (Note: Panamanians casting a vote for Martinelli must do so under the banner of one of the four parties that comprise the Alliance for Change; the logic is that the better-represented parties would hold more sway in a Martinelli presidency.) The Panamenistas are also in charge of the Alliance's own election-day tabulation system that will "run parallel to the TE." According to Allen, "Although Martinelli has thousands of independent volunteers, they lack experience. It is the Panamenistas who have the structure to deliver on election day."

Comment

¶ 14. (C) Panama's TE is reputable, and the election will most likely proceed without major incident. As in any election, there exists in Panama the potential for TE officials to mis-report vote results and therefore produce errors in the preliminary tally. But there is no reason to believe that

this would occur, or that TE officials would purposefully manipulate the results. Similarly, computer failure is always a possibility, but there is no compelling reason to think that one will occur on May 3. Given these "what if" scenarios, and since the system is new, there does exist the possibility that some candidates will refuse to concede on the pretext that electronic mistakes have skewed the results.

But we predict that Martinelli will secure victory by a wide enough margin in the presidential contest to prevent any serious allegations of errors or fraud.

¶ 15. (C) Allen's comments on the Panamenistas' efforts to boost their vote tallies tracks with analysts' comments to the Political Section over the past few weeks. A key dynamic in a Martinelli presidency will be the relationship between the Panamenistas, the country's well-established, second-largest party, and the upstart CD party. Especially with the failures of the PRD this electoral season, the Panamenistas are looking down the road to the 2014 election, and want to try to position Varela such that he can exert authority and influence in a Martinelli administration. Martinelli's "autocratic" decision-making style, coupled with what we expect to be a strong mandate granted to Martinelli on May 3, however, will likely mitigate Panamenista influence in the new government; a sizable Panamenista turnout would force Martinelli to reckon more with the Panamenistas than he might be inclined to otherwise.

STEPHENSON